April 9, 2018

SNAPS In Focus: Preventing and Ending Youth Homelessness

As many of you aware, HUD and its public and private partners continue to advance actions to prevent and end youth homelessness. Over the past several years, we've seen increased momentum in our work together. These efforts are highlighted by the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP); the 100-Day Challenges to end Youth Homelessness; and the recent release of benchmarks and criteria to end youth homelessness by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH). Through these efforts, communities have learned that there are several critical aspects to ending youth homelessness: engaging youth with lived experience to drive the development of a youth homeless response system; partnering with a wide range of youth-serving community partners; and using the best available data to drive the creation of a system that best responds to the needs of youth in your community.

Youth and young adults with lived experience of homelessness have driven the design and execution of the YHDP. HUD also contracted with youth members of the True Colors Fund's National Youth Forum on Homelessness (NYFH) to help review the FY 2016 YHDP applications and some of these same youth, as well as other members of the NYFH, are providing technical assistance to support the first ten selected communities. We will similarly engage young adults for the FY 2017 YHDP Competition. Young adults from each of the 100-Day Challenge Communities were valuable members of the team, helping to ensure that the changes being implemented met the needs of local youth. We believe communities should mirror this process:

- Include young people with lived experience at the beginning of any local planning, efforts to address youth homelessness and throughout the implementation period.
- Engage youth as valued partners in idea generation.
- Give youth shared decision-making authority over the policies and projects that will affect their lives and the lives of their peers.
- Train the young people partnering with your CoC on broader homelessness systems and policies. This increased knowledge will help the young people feel more empowered and help them make more powerful contributions to the work.
- To truly value their contributions, young people should be paid.

As evidenced by our own commitment to working closely with numerous federal agencies, national partners, and young adults with lived experience, we strongly believe that our efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness are strengthened when we engage the stakeholders impacted by our work throughout the entire process. Similarly, communities benefit most when they work across traditional silos and systems to address youth homelessness. Key partners include CoCs, Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) providers, schools, child welfare agencies, and juvenile and adult justice systems.

Many times, our instinct when developing systems is to first come up with what we think is the best intervention or have experienced some level of success with in the past before looking at what our data actually tells us about the community's needs and then identifying the interventions that are most likely to address those needs. Making decisions before looking at the data is a backwards way of planning a system. HUD requires that selected YHDP communities develop a coordinated community plan that first assesses the needs of youth at-risk of and experiencing homelessness in the community, including their needs for education, employment, health, permanent connections, and

well-being, in addition to housing. Communities also assess the needs of special populations at higher risk of experiencing homelessness, including racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ youth, parenting youth, youth involved in the foster care and juvenile justice systems, and youth victims of human trafficking. Notably, none of these communities have perfect data regarding youth experiencing homelessness. By using the **b**est **a**vailable **d**ata (lovingly referred to as B.A.D. data by several of the communities) and regularly reviewing new data to adjust projects and systems accordingly, communities have the capacity to build systems that best respond to the needs of young people in a timely manner.

There are several steps that your community can take now to reduce and end youth homelessness:

- Apply for FY 2017 YHDP funds – applications are due April 17, 2018. This can be a positive and measurable step in your community's effort to prevent and end youth homelessness and can also serve as a springboard to further work on addressing youth homelessness in your community.
- Apply for Transitional Living Program (TLP) and Maternity Group Home (MGH) grants through the RHY Program, due May 14, 2018.
- Consider how your community is responding to and addressing youth homelessness using the USICH Benchmarks and Criteria for Achieving the Goal of Ending Youth Homelessness. Use the Assessment Questions to track your progress on preventing and ending youth homelessness.
- Consider launching a 100-Day Challenge to catalyze youth homelessness efforts in your community, using Continuum of Care planning dollars or local philanthropic support.
- Check out the Coordinated Community Plans for the FY 2016 YHDP communities. These plans can serve as both a roadmap for communities considering creating their own plans to address youth homelessness, as well as providing ideas for partners, data, and potential project models.
- Read and consider technical assistance tools on youth homelessness produced by Federal and National Partners, including:
    - HUD
    - RHY
    - USICH
    - National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY)
    - National Alliance to End Homelessness
    - A Way Home America
    - True Colors Fund
    - MANY
    - National Network for Youth

Thank you for all the hard work that you do to end homelessness in your community every day.

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